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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test House's and Mason's hypothesis (1975) that only a weak relationship exists between political alienation and traditional demographic definitions of social position. Such demographic variables include age, sex, socioeconomic status, length of residency in the community, and occupational prestige. Data was collected a week before the city council election in a southwestern community where an increase in utility rates had been a major issue. A respondent's agreement with one statement in the survey, that citizens do not have much control over what city officials do, was scored as alienation. Results show that 65% of those surveyed feel alienation toward community leaders and that demographic variables explain only a small percentage of the variation between alienated and unalienated segments of the community. Further conclusions are that (1) the high level of alienation did not stem from the unpopularity of the utility rate increase, (2) the views of both groups regarding the need for community services are similar, and (3) the characteristics of the alienated majority must be ascertained anew. This majority's sense of responsibility combined with their feelings of mistrust can lead to a reappraisal of community needs. References and statistical tables are included. (KC)

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The Alienated Majority:
A Community Study

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The Alienated Majority:
A Community Study

Recently House and Mason (1975) have challenged the widely accepted model which underlies much of political sociology, namely that people's social positions as defined by demographic categories determine their views on political issues and that these views in relation to actual policy and events determine their level of alienation. They suggest rather that the link between traditional demographic definitions of social position and issue attitudes was weak in the late 1960's. They further argue that the relationship has perhaps never been as great as this simplistic model widely used by social scientists.

The data upon which House and Mason base their conclusions regarding political alienation are the University of Michigan SRC data which dealt with national issues relevant to the period from 1952-1968. They compare the effects of both issue attitude and demographic characteristics upon political alienation over this time period. Results of their analysis showed that shifts in alienation occurred uniformly across all major demographically defined groups of the population. In addition, where issue-attitudes and demographic position did correspond, the effect was often "to pit two alienated extremes against a less alienated middle" They conclude, ". . . It is little wonder that changes in alienation appear quite uniform across the whole population" (House and Mason, 1975: 145).

The study reported here speaks to this theoretical issue raised by House and Mason by using a single community. The study investigates the relationship of

demographic variables and issue attitudes for a single community issue to alienation from city officials. The purpose of the research is to see if the pattern within this single community is similar to or different from that shown for the national analysis.

A number of researchers have regarded community politics as concerned with specific issues to a greater extent than national politics (e.g., Horton and Thompson, 1962; Eckhardt and Hendershot, 1967). Furthermore, the specific issues are seen as providing alienated members of the community with targets for the direct expression of negative sentiments. Thus they interpret high percentages of "no" votes to community projects as the votes of the alienated members of a community. On this basis, we might predict a stronger relationship between issue-attitudes and political alienation than is found for national politics.

On the other hand, Boskoff and Zeigler (1964) emphasize that the reason alienated citizens vote has little or no relation to the issues in an election. Rather, they argue, the alienated voter feels that he does not belong and his vote is likely to be an expression of distrust at what is perceived to be the in-group of local politics. The positive vote reflects a more cognitive appraisal of community needs. If the interpretation of Boskoff and Zeigler is correct then the relationship between issue-attitudes and alienation may be relatively weak.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The community issue dealt with in the study is a utility rate increase adopted by the city council of a Southwestern university town in the spring of 1974.[1] The rate increase approximately doubled minimum water, sewage and garbage rates and precipitated quite general community objection. A new citizen's group was organized and circulated petitions to force the city council to rescind its action.

The rate increase was regressive in character, raising the rates of small

users to a greater extent than large water users. The City Council members defended the increases as needed to fund community services and threatened that services to the elderly, youth, etc. would have to be curtailed if the rate increase was not maintained. Under the pressure of court action by the new citizens group to uphold the validity of the petitions, a study committee was appointed and eventually recommended a compromise rate intermediate between old and new minimum rates.

The data for the study were collected one week prior to the city council election in the spring of 1975. The rate increase was the main issue of the election. Several candidates endorsed by the citizens group had campaigned that they would reduce the utility rates back to the old minimum.[2]

Residents of the community were surveyed regarding their view of the rate increase and the city services they would be willing to eliminate or reduce to maintain a lower utility rate. City blocks were selected by means of a random numbers table and ten homes on each selected block were contacted. The questionnaires were administered between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. in the evening to insure that both men and women would be at home. The first adult member of the household contacted by the interviewer was asked to complete the questionnaire. One hundred eight-six questionnaires were obtained. Complete data for all items used in the analysis were obtained for 141 questionnaires.

The respondents were asked their view regarding the utility rate increase. They were asked if they favored (1) reducing the minimum rate to $8.25 (the old minimum), (2) reducing it to $11.00 (the compromise suggested by the City Council Study Committee and being advocated by some of the candidates for City Council), or (3) maintaining the present $ 5.00 minimum rate. Scores for this item correspond with the alternative selected.

A single item within the questionnarie was used as an index of political alienation. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "People do not have much control over what city officials

do."[3] Agreement with the statement was scored as alienation (1). Disagreement or uncertainty was scored as lack of alienation (0).

The demographic variables included in the analysis were age, sex, education, length of residence in the city, income and occupational prestige as measured by the Socio-Economic Indexes of Detailed Occupation developed by Bogue (1964). Race was not included as a variable in the analysis because of the low percentage of Black population in the city.[4] A regression analysis with forward stepwise inclusion of variables was used to ascertain the variance in both view on the utility rate increase and alienation accounted for by these demographic categories.[5] A standard regression analysis with hierarchical control was used to compare the strength of demographic variables and view on the utility rate as predictors of alienation. Although several of the variables are ordinal or dichotomous in character, regression analysis was judged as a statistical technique which would result in minimum distortion (Boyle, 1970).

In order to speak of the question of citizen responsibility, subjects were also asked for their views of influences upon the city council and their support of specific city services and programs. A chi-square comparison of alienated and unalienated subjects was made for these questionnaire items.

RESULTS

The first task of the analysis is to examine the distribution of responses to the political issue in question, i.e., the utility rate increase and the ability of the demographic variables to predict the subject's views. Secondly, the level of alienation and the variance which is accounted for by political view and the demographic variables must be ascertained. Finally, the similarities and differences between the alienated and unalienated respondents are examined.

Political View: The Utility Rate Increase

The first conclusion drawn from the data is the general unpopularity of the

utility rate increase. Fifty-four percent of the respondents favored a reduction to the old $8.25 rate. Another 41% favored reduction to $11.00 and only 5% favored maintaining the new minimum rate of $15.00.

With such a large proportion of the respondents favoring reduction of the rate, it is not surprising that the demographic variables show little relationship to view on this issue. Table 1 shows the effects of each of the demographic variables on the political issue. All of the demographic variables taken together explain only approximately 8% of the variance. Income and education are the most strongly related variables. These persons with greater income and those with greater education favored the higher utility rates. In fact, one might expect income to be the most strongly related indicator given the economic nature of the political issue in question.

Insert Table 1 here

Alienation from Community Leaders

The level of alienation is also high for the community with 65% of the respondents agreeing that "People do not have much control over what city officials do." Twenty-five percent of the citizens disagreed with the statement and 10% were undecided. The use of the single item thus identifies a broad spectrum of people who indicate a feeling of alienation from community leaders.[7]

As was the case with the rate increase, the demographic variables demonstrate low predictive ability. Table 2 summarizes the effect of these variables on alienation. The findings are consistent with those of other studies.[8] Occupational prestige is the variable most strongly related to alienation with individuals low on the socio-economic index more likely to agree that people have little control over city officials. Education is the second best predictor,

again with low education associated with distrust of city officials. Age and income add approximately the same increment to R^2 when included within the regression equation. Youth and those with low income are the individuals most likely to be alienated. Sex and length of residence explain the least amount of variance unexplained by the variables already in the equation. We can only conclude, however, that all of the correlations are low and that only a small proportion of the variance is explained by the demographic variables.

Insert Table 2 here

On the basis of the past studies which link no votes against so called progressive policies of a community with alienation, we might expect that the high level of alienation is related to the high negative response to the utility rate increase. This, however, is not the case, Table 3, which compares the effects of the demographic variables and the rate increase opinion shows that the relationship between attitude and alienation is quite low. The R for both demographic variables and attitude taken together is .404; however for attitude alone it is only .168. The six demographic variables explain a greater portion of the variance than does the attitude regarding the rate increase. This is opposite the reation found by Mason and House in their study of political alienation in America between attitude and demographic variables. However, the magnitude of R^2 found between the demographic variables and alienation is quite similar for the two studies. House and Mason report an R^2 of .154. For this study the comparative figure is .163. The single item for issue-attitude used in this study and the greatly unpopular nature of the utitlity increase perhaps account for the smaller predictive value of attitude than that shown by House and Mason.

Insert Table 3 here

Comparison of Alienated and Unalienated Citizens

Perception of factors which may have influenced the City Council to raise utility rates: The subjects were asked who they believed had the greatest power over city government action. The choices supplied in the form of a check list were (1) the mayor, (2) bankers and businessmen, (3) a few influential citizen groups, and (4) no one group or individual influences the council. Individuals could check all or none of these choices. Table 4 shows the distribution of response for this item. The alienated were somewhat more likely to believe that bankers and businessmen had the greatest influence over city government (52.3% compared to 40.7% for the unalienated respondents). The unalienated were somewhat more likely to believe that no one group or individual had more power over city officials (24.1% compared to 11.6% among the alienated). These differences, however, were not statistically significant at the .05 level. There was virtually no difference in the percentage of alienated and unalienated citizens who believed that a few influential citizen groups had power over city officials (approximately 38% for both groups). Also both groups perceived the mayor as unpowerful.

Insert Table 4 here

Boskoff and Zeigler (1964) cite resistance to growth as a characteristic of community residents lacking in civic responsibility. In this study a negative view of future growth characterizes slightly under half (47.1%) of the

alienated citizens compared to approximately one third of the unalienated respondents. A larger percentage of alienated subjects also cited negative consequences of future growth such as loss of small town atmosphere, becoming a bedroom community and greater pollution of the environment. The unalienated had a greater tendency to cite positive consequences such as greater revenue to the city, new industry and jobs, more opportunities, greater diversity of cultural and recreational activities, and greater diversity of population. The differences, however, for each individual item are not statistically significant. Table 5 shows the percentages of alienated and unalienated citizens checking a particular item as a perceived consequence of future growth. Attitude toward growth is not a good indicator of alienation for this community.

The subjects were also asked why they thought the city council wanted to raise the minimum rate for utilities. Again, a check list was provided which included the following items: (1) because of inflation, (2) to make the city council rich, (3) to fund extravagant needless programs, and (4) to fund needed additional city services and programs. As shown by Table 6, the alienated were significantly more likely to believe that the city council had raised utility rates to fund needless programs. However, only 38.4% checked needless programs as a probable reason for the rate increase. Just as high a percentage among the alienated respondents indicated that the additional funds were to provide needed city services and that inflation was the culprit. Neither the alienated nor the unalienated perceived the city council as serving their own interests with the utility hike.

Support of City Services: While the response of the alienated citizens to factors which might influence the city council tended to be negative, their support of city services was not.

As shown in Table 7 neither the alienated nor the unalienated wanted to cut back on the senior citizen's center, senior citizen's bus, or team center. There was more sentiment among both groups to cut back on recreational classes

and to end community financing of a golf course and park. The two groups did not significantly differ in the proportion favoring the reduction of salaries or number of limiting community expenses. Reduction of expenditures on city office buildings, and reduction of salaries and staff for administrative officers were the cutbacks favored most often by both groups. Approximately 65% of both categories indicated that the staff for administrative officers should be reduced: a smaller percentage within both categories (49.4% alienated and 35.8% unalienated) favored reduction of salaries for administrative officers.

Willingness to make changes in garbage collection services and in use of water during summer months as means of maintaining lower utility rates were also indicated by substantial proportions of citizens. More of the alienated were willing to impose restrictions in use of water during summer months for washing cars, and were willing to limit garbage pickup to once instead of twice a week at curbside. In general, the alienated citizens appear to be as responsible on these items as the unalienated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has not attempted to delineate that segment of community citizens which is the most alienated, nor to provide an indepth look at those most alienated. Rather it indicates a broad spectrum of community citizens who agree with the statement that "people do not have much control over what city officials do." The most significant finding of the study is just how broad this segment of the population is and how similar they are to the unalienated respondents. As was the case for the national sample of House and Mason, demographic variables explain only a small percentage of the variation between alienated and unalienated segments of the community. In addition, alienation showed only a slight relationship to the specific political issue of current interest in the community indicating that the high level of alienation did not stem predominantly from the unpopularity of the utility rate increase. The views of the alienated and unalienated regarding the need for community services and the means by which greater savings of community revenue should be accomplished are similar. We can only conclude that the broad spectrum of citizens indicating alienation from city officials include not only those who oppose the so called "progressive" programs of the community, but a portion of those who favor them as well.

This broad spectrum of alienated citizens do not fit the characterization as irresponsible of the "no voter" as discussed by Boskoff and Zeigler. While there may be some of these alienated "irresponsibles" within the larger segment who agree with the single item, such a profile does not characterize the group as a whole.

The general increase in political alienation which occurred in recent years has led to a variety of interpretations of the consequences of increased lack of confidence in the political process and leaders. Apathy and withdrawal are often predicted for national politics (e.g., Wright, 1976). On the other hand,

Gilmour and Lamb (1975) found that 35% of those they characterize as most alienated retained an interest in politics by continuing to vote and trying to influence others. These alienated reformers, they report, are often to the left or the right of center in American political thinking. Weinstein (1975) argues that in the absence of a viable left in the United States, a turn to the right is the most likely consequence.

Most of these predictions rest upon the assumption that the newly alienated citizens will have characteristics similar to those of the fewer alienated citizens in the past. The conclusion which may be drawn from this study is that this assumption is unwarranted. Rather, the characteristics of the alienated majority must be ascertained anew.

A high level of participation in community affairs by this alienated majority may have positive instead of negative consequences. Responsibility toward the community combined with a general distrust of past political abuses may result in a constructive re-appraisal of community needs. The extent to which this alienated majority does participate in community decision-making deserves serious study by social scientists.

FOOTNOTES

[1]U.S. Census Bureau lists the 1970 urban population of the community as 48,627.

[2]The three candidates, who were supported by the citizen's group, were elected and the utility rate was reduced to the old $8.25 minimum rate.

[3]This item is similar to the NO SAY item used by Mason and House in their study of "Political Alienation in America." Mason and House concluded that two items taken from the SRC Survey, DON'T CARE and NO SAY are valid measures of political trust. They state that both cross-sectionally and over time responses to these items reflect the level of popular disaffection with major political policies and events. NO SAY item: People like me don't have any say about what the government does. DON'T CARE item: I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.

[4]The 1970 Census lists 392 Negro residents in the community. One hundred sixty-one of this small number were university students. Only 27 families are listed.

[5]With stepwise regression, independent variables are entered in single steps from best to worst. The variable that explains the greatest amount of variance in the dependent variable is entered first. Subsequent variables enter the equation in the order in which they explain the greatest amount of variance unexplained by the variables already in the equation. Thus purely statistical criteria are used in determining the order of entry of independent variables. The independent variable chosen at each step is the one which has the largest squared partial correlation with the dependent variable (Nie, et. al., 1970).

[6]Boyle (1970) concludes that interval-scale assumptions are not of crucial importance in path or regression analysis because appreciable distortion depends not on the magnitude of error, but on special coincidences between more than one kind of error.

[7]For 1968 House and Mason report 41% and 44% agreement with the SRC NO SAY and DON'T CARE items taken as indices of alienation (See Footnote 3). Citrin, et.al. (1975) report from 69.9% to 23. % alienated responses on individual 'core' items within their Political Alienation Index which was composed of 8 items elicitng a judgment about some aspect of the political system at the national level. The subjects for their study were drawn from the five-county San Francisco - Oakland SMSA in 1972. Comparison of the level of alienation found in other community studies is difficult because of lack of consistency in indices used for alienation and for cut off point in determining high and low alienation. The level of alienation found in this study is closest to that reported by Horton and Thompson (1962) for two upstate New York communities in 1957 and 1958. Horton and Thompson used a two item score of powerless and consciousness of potential menacing power as political alienation. Subjects were dichotomized into "alienated" and "not alienated" categories.

Both the present study and that of Horton and Thompson report higher percentages of alienated subjects than do Templeton (1966) and Eckhardt and Hendershot (1960). Templeton's study in Berkeley in 1960 used one version of Srole's anomic scale to indicate alienation and classifies subjects into high and low alienation. The study of Eckhardt and Hendershot of a small Midwestern community in 1966 used a four item index including (1) awareness of the existence of a power structure, (2) feelings of powerlessness when confronted with power, (3) recognition that the politically powerful engage in community decision making and (4) disagreement with the strategy and goals of the powerful. Subjects were categorized as "Most Alienated" and "Least Alienated." The total community level of alienation was not regarded as an issue in these three earlier studies.

[8]Although there are differences in the levels of alienations reported in the studies cited above (see Footnote 7), there is general agreement in the direction of the relationship of the demographic variables to alienation.

[9]Format for this table is taken from Mason and House.

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Table 1. Variance in rate increase view accounted for by demographic variables.

Demographic Variables	Simple r	Multiple R	R^2	Increment to R^2 upon including each additional variable	Significance Level of F ratio
Income	.21	.211	.044	.044	.05
Education	.20	.259	.067	.022	.01
Age	.13	.274	.075	.007	N.S.
Sex	-.07	.280	.078	.004	N.S.
Occupational Prestige	.09	.286	.082	.004	.05
Length of Residence	.06	.286	.082	.0001	N.S.

N = 141 Mean Score for view on utility rate increase 1.52.

Table 2. Variance in Political Alienation accounted for by demographic variables.

Demographic Variables	Simple r	Mutliple R	R^2	Increment to R^2 upon including each additional variable	Significance Level of F ratio
Occupational Prestige	-.26	.259	.067	.067	.05
Eduation	-.23	.306	.094	.026	.01
Age	-.18	.342	.117	.023	N.S.
Income	-.07	.375	.141	.023	N.S.
Sex	-.02	.383	.147	.006	.05
Length of Residence	-.005	.386	.149	.002	N.S.

N = 141 Mean Score for political alienation .62.

Table 3. Variance in Political Alienation Accounted for by rate increase view and Demographic Variable.[9]

Demographic and issue-attitude as independent variables	Multiple R	R^2
View regarding rate increase	.168	.028
All Demographic Variables	.386	.149
Increment to R^2 upon including attitude after demographic variables		.014
Increment to R^2 upon including demographic varaibles after attitude		.135
View regarding rate increase and demographic variables taken together	.404	.163

N = 141 Mean score for political alienation .62

1) Entires in row (3) are derived from subtracting corresponding entires in row 2 from thse in row (5).

2) Entires in row (4) are derived from subtracting corresponding entires in row 1 from those in row (5).

Table 4. Percentage of Alienated and Unalienated citizens checking a yes response to sources of power over city government action.

Source of Power	Alienated	Unalienated
Mayor	18.6%	13.0%
Bankers and Businessmen	52.3%	40.7%
A few influential citizen groups	38.4%	38.9%
No one group or individual	11.6%	24.1%

N = 140

No items significant at .05 level.

Table 5. Percentage of alienated and unalienated citizens checking to yes response to reasons for utility rate increase

Reasons for Utility Rate Increase	Alienated	Unalienated	Level of Significance of x^2
Inflation	39.5%	50.0%	
To Make City Council Rich	7.0%	0.0%	.05
To Fund Needless Programs	38.4%	16.7%	.01
To Fund Needed Programs	38.5%	70.4%	.001

N = 140

Table 6. Percentage of alienated and unalienated citizens checking a yes response to items pertaining to future growth of the community.

	Alienated	Unalienated	Level of Significance of r^2
Favor Growth	52.9%	62.3%	
Consequence of Growth:			
Loose small-town atmosphere	60.9%	48.1%	
Bring greater revenue to the city	42.5%	46.3%	
Become a bedroom community	33.7%	18.5%	
Bring new industry and more jobs	48.3%	50.0%	
Greater pollution of the environment	52.9%	35.2%	.05
More opportunities	42.5%	48.1%	
Bring greater diversity of cultural and recreational activities	33.3%	38.9%	
Bring greater diversity of population	29.8%	30.2%	

Table 7. Percentage of alienated and unalienated citizens checking a yes response to changes in city services and personnel.

Type of City Service	Alienated	Unalienated	Level of Significance of x^2
Recreational Services (Favor ending community financing)			
Senior Citizens Center	13.1%	0.0%	
Senior Citizens Bus	17.9%	5.8%	
Golf course and park	52.3%	40.7%	
Teen center	19.0%	11.5%	
Recreational classes	42.4%	34.0%	
Costs of Administration of City Government			
Reduction of expenditures on city office buildings	73.8%	61.5%	
Reduction of salaries for:			
Administrative officers	49.4%	35.8%	
Police	10.3%	2.7%	
Firemen	5.8%	2.7%	
Rank and File employees	15.3%	13.2%	
All City employees	6.1%	5.4%	
Reduction of number of employees:			
Staff for administrative officers	65.9%	65.4%	
Police	33.3%	20.8%	
Firemen	3.5%	4.0%	
Rank and File employees	35.7%	28.3%	
All City employees	14.6%	9.6%	
Changes in Garbage Collection:			
Requiring use of plastic bags	36.7%	51.9%	
Curside pick up of garbage	62.7%	46.2%	
One per week collection	45.0%	26.9%	.02
Restrictions on use of water:			
Restricting the use of water during summer months for washing cars	60.0%	50.0%	
Restricting the use of water for lawns to alternate days of the week	53.5%	75.9%	.02

N = 140